

Dear Age Sage,

My daughter wants me to go to her yoga class with her. To be honest, I'm not sure I will be able to get up, once I get down on the floor! It does seem as if I am getting stiffer every day, but I just wonder if I am too old, at age 83 to try yoga. What do you think?

Signed,

Ooommmm Just Too Old

Dear Ooommmm:

Like you, most people picture a yoga class filled with youthful-looking, limber people doing headstands or pretzel-like poses. In fact, there are many different types of yoga, and many older adults are getting in on this new exercise trend. Yoga is adaptable for people of all ages, shapes, and fitness levels, including the overweight and the inflexible. You can work at your own pace and it doesn't take long to feel the results of being more flexible.

Focusing on breathing while doing yoga poses improves balance and coordination, helps improve blood flow, extends joints' range of motion, and eases tight muscles, making it less likely that you will injure yourself or fall during everyday activities. An added bonus: Yoga's slow stretches combined with deep breathing exercises may help relieve stress.

Yoga has been shown to help people with COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) in that it helps strengthen their respiratory muscles, giving them control over breathlessness. A comprehensive yoga program can have a salutary effect on general health and respiratory health, and can thereby help increase a person's ability to perform activities of daily living. COPD is known to increase the level of stress, emotional vulnerability, inactivity and muscle wasting. Yoga techniques are particularly suited for promoting relaxation, psycho-emotional stability and exercise tolerance.

You can get started on your own with guidance from a book, magazine or DVD, but signing up for a class may be your best bet - especially if you are a beginner. Instructors can teach you how to hold and move your body correctly while using soft yoga blocks, blankets and other props to support your body and make poses more comfortable. They can also offer reassurance that keeps you motivated and coming to class.

Senior centers, adults schools, health clubs, and of course, yoga schools offer classes or people of all ages. But not all yoga classes are alike, so ask before you sign up. For example, *Ashtanga yoga* involves vigorous athletic movements, while *Iyengar yoga* emphasizes more mental focus while using props like chairs and blocks to help align your body properly. *Hatha yoga*

emphasizes breathing and stretching which is a great choice for beginners. There are also *chair yoga* classes, if you have physical limitations. You will still be able to improve your flexibility, mobility and balance by performing poses in a chair.

A new class has just opened in Portsmouth, NH. It is Chair Yoga for Seniors 70 and Over. It is held every Wednesday from 10:45 - 11:45am. The instructor, Amelia McKenney, has many years of experience, and told me about an 86-year-old woman in her class who, in the first few weeks was very apprehensive and doubtful about the benefits of yoga. But after only a few weeks, she had improved so much that she asked Amelia to help her do it a little more vigorously! Please call Ocean Spirit Yoga for more information at 603-766-0979.

**TIP:**

Although yoga is generally safe for healthy older adults, talk with your doctor before beginning.

Until next month,

The Age Sage

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